Partnerships for Peace in Africa: New Challenges and Threats Facing Africa

ADDRESS

by

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1. Introduction

The President of the International Peace Academy, Ambassador Terje Rod-Larsen
Senior Fellow, Ambassador John L. Hirsch,
Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Felberbauer,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to Ambassador Terje Rod-Larsen, President of the International Peace Academy and his colleagues, for inviting me to deliver a keynote address: “New Challenges and Threats Facing Africa”. I also wish to commend your organization for its continued efforts in promoting debate and greater understanding of the major challenges facing Africa as well as renewed commitment by the international community to assist in meeting them.

Mr. Chairman,

African countries are facing multiple and complex challenges which include peace and security: sustainable development, democratisation and respect for human rights. While the primary responsibility for addressing these challenges rest with the people and governments of Africa, they must not be left to their own devises in a truly interdependent world. Hence, the United Nations, and the international community in general, need to support the efforts being made by the Africans to address the challenges facing the African continent. But for the UN to be a credible agent for the change in Africa’s fortunes in a changing world, it must continue to reform and renew itself.

In this regard, Secretary-General Kofi Annan created a 16-member Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and tasked it with "examining the major threats and challenges the world faces in the broad field of peace and security, including economic and social
issues in so far as they relate to peace and security and making recommendations for the elements of a collective response”. And as you are aware, the Panel has since submitted its Report titled "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility”.

The Secretary-General Kofi Annan subsequently released on March 21, 2005, a report entitled “In Larger Freedom: Toward Development, Security and Human Rights for All”, that puts forward a comprehensive action plan to strengthen the UN’s capacity for tackling poverty, security threats and human rights abuses. The report presents specific recommendations for national governments on these three subjects and concludes by proposing steps to make the UN “a more effective instrument” for pursuing these priorities. The Secretary-General’s Report is based on extensive consultations with Member States and others and also drew upon the Report of the Millennium Project, which resulted in a strategy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In both Reports of the High-Level Panel and that of Secretary-General, the special needs of Africa were recognized and many of their recommendations are aimed at helping to address them.

2. The New Challenges and Threats Facing Africa: Peace and Security, Sustainable development and Democratisation

Although each of these challenges would be discussed separately, they are clearly interrelated and a holistic perspective would enhance our understanding of the African situation and therefore the multi-dimensional efforts to address them.

I. Peace and Security

The proliferation of wars and conflicts continues to undermine peace and security in Africa despite the generally positive trend we have witnessed in the last four years. While Africa’s longest running wars have been resolved or being resolved (Angola and North/South conflict in Sudan), the conflicts in Western Darfur and now Togo are significant set backs to conflict resolution and peace in the continent.
Nonetheless, in addressing the root causes of wars and conflicts in Africa and identifying non-military threats to security, we have to recognize those posed by illiteracy, poverty and disease. In addition, we have Terrorism, HIV/AIDS pandemic; illegitimate use of constitutionally acquired power; crisis of youth employment; mismanagement of natural resources; demographic pressures; organized crime and corruption at the national level and the proliferation of small arms. I will touch on these briefly in this presentation.

a) Africa’s approach to the Efforts against Terrorism

In July 1999, the African States signed, under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Algeria. This Convention has entered into force on 6 December 2002. A Plan of Action to operationalize this Convention was later approved by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the successor organization, the AU, in Maputo in July 2003. The broad approach to combating terrorism has involved two types of activities at the level of African Union and at the level of sub-regional organizations: the design of instruments to facilitate action at the national level and co-operation between the states and undertaking operational measures to prevent, deter and combat terrorist acts.

One of the key lessons of September 11 for the West is that the security of the North can no longer be separate from the security of the South. On their part, the Africans realise that when terrorists attacked the US Embassies in Nairobi and Kenya, more Africans were killed than the Americans who were the targets and this has implications for the future. This therefore re-enforces the collective desire to find global solutions to global problems. Closer cooperation with African nations and multi-dimensional support from the Western partners for capacity building, technology transfer and additional resources are crucial if the continent is to increase its ongoing role and efforts against world terrorism.
b) HIV/AIDS AS New Threat To Peace, Security And Development

Mr. Chairman,

When AIDS emerged over two decades ago, few people could predict the devastating impact that the disease would have. The prevalence rates among people between 25-49 years old exceeds 10% in 16 countries of the subcontinent. Africa is a home of the 70% of the infected adults and 80% of the infected children. AIDS has devastated many communities in Africa, rolled back decades of development and pushed stigmatised groups to the margins of the society. Thus AIDS has destroyed the social fabric, impeding normal education and transmission of experience from generation to generation to take place. Africa is yet to cope with the issue of treatment of millions of people infected in addition to providing social security to orphan children, as millions of adults continue to fall ill and die, and as household, communities and whole sectors of economy stagger under the burden.

In partnership with the efforts being made by the Africans themselves at the national and regional levels, a number of important initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of AIDS have been taking place within the UN framework and outside. The establishment of UNAIDS, a coalition of UN agencies aimed at designing and adopting common strategies to tackle the issue of AIDS in the continent has proved to be important. The establishment of African Partnership for AIDS which is another coalition involving governments, civil society organisations, donors, and the private sector has also contributed to the fight against AIDS. Furthermore, the General Assembly has set a target of reducing infections by 25% among 15-24 year olds, in the most affected countries by the year 2005 and the UN Secretary-General urged the Millennium Summit to support the goal of ensuring that 90% of young people have access to necessary information, education and services to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS by 2005, and this proportion should rise to at least 95% by 2010.
c) **The Crisis of Youth Unemployment**

The African youths, a group of people between 15 to 22 years of age, comprises more than 60 percent of the population, but are frequently denied access to health care, education and income-generating opportunities. Africa has also the largest number of child or young soldiers. The average unemployment rate among the African youth is 13 percent. The youth crisis is more pronounced in societies affected by armed conflict, particularly those attempting to recover from the effects of war. In many of these countries, Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Programmes (DDR), have been inadequate to address many problems of youth unemployment and other challenges. Thus, many countries emerging from conflict experience heightened crime rates, widespread climate of insecurity, which may gradually lead the country back to violence. As a contribution to addressing this challenge, my Office (OSAA) is organizing a Conference on “DDR and Stability in Africa” to be hosted by the Government of Sierra Leone in June or July 2005, in Freetown.

d) **Demographic Pressures**

Population pressures are increasing in many poor and ecologically fragile zones in the urban as well as rural areas in Africa. Since fertility in many of these places is very high, many people are being driven to them because of their need for land for subsistence farming, poverty and high population densities elsewhere. This is the case of coastal communities in large towns and poor communities along West Africa, border communities especially in countries affected by conflict. Since poor people depend heavily on natural resources for their survival and direct income, the shortage of these resources in densely populated countries has heightened inter-communal competition leading to skirmishes and inter-communal violence. There is also increasing migration from individuals and communities of one country to another in search for farming and grazing land, as well as water resources in West, Central and East Africa.
Demographic pressures and consequent migration of population are becoming serious source of conflict in the Niger Delta, the coastal communities in West Africa and parts of central and eastern Africa. While population growth is not per se detrimental to environmental sustainability, it affects available choices and prospects of any intervention. In this regard, there is an urgent need to study available options and to formulate appropriate strategies to mitigate against the demographic pressures which promotes conflicts.

e) Better Management of Natural Resources

Efforts at consolidating peace and building security in Africa should seek to address the issue of illegal exploitation of natural resources and their commercialisation in Western markets. The illicit exploitation of natural resources (diamonds, columbo-tantalite, semi-precious stones, timber, cocoa and coffee), have been one of the major factors contributing to prolonged conflicts in Africa. The international community needs to extend mechanisms such as the Kimberly process to impede illegal sales of the aforementioned commodities as a way of preventing conflicts or their escalation. The UK-led initiative for greater transparency in the extractive industries is a positive step in promoting accountability and better management of national resources. These efforts would constitute a reliable road map towards conflict prevention and post conflict peace-building in Africa.

f) Transnational Organized Crime

In the last two decades of the 20th Century, significant technological advances were made especially in the area of transport and telecommunications which have facilitated the flow of information and circulation of goods and services, people and capital. These developments have led the corporations to increasingly operate transnationally. However, the very developments that facilitate the circulation of people, goods and services and money also facilitate the transportation of drugs, arms, dirty money and illegal immigrants. Globalisation has had the unintended consequence of facilitating the
expansion of networks of organised crime and of black markets which pose challenges for the maintenance of law and order and international security.

In relatively weak states with less consolidated institutions, the challenge is even greater. Weak states do not possess effective know-how to conduct proper investigations and devise mechanisms to counteract Transnational Organised Crime. They have very low levels of law enforcement, yet their economies enable them to offer incentives for the development of good civil service that can resist corruption and favour the rule of law. As a result, their domestic environment facilitates the operation of criminal groups, since most of the criminal activity goes unchecked. In this regard, the conclusion of the UN Convention on corruption is a welcome development and its ratification and implementation would help Africa address this particular challenge. The decision by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to organize a Round Table jointly with the African Union in Addis Ababa, May 30-31, 2005, on “The Rule of Law and Protection of the Most Vulnerable: Why Fighting Crime can Assist Development in Africa” is also positive.

g) The proliferation of small arms

The end of the Cold War has also been accompanied by a surplus of weapons in the international markets since the normal legal markets of weapons shrank. This resulted in an increasing competition among the producers who have increasingly identified new buyers. The decline in price has facilitated the sale of weapons to non-state actors who are able to wreck havoc and cause disturbances in relatively weak states with weak institutions. In those states, there is an expansion of criminal activity that allows the establishment of regular markets through indirect and illegal channels. General insecurity permits greater transfer of resources from public sphere to illegal activities, thus making room for a protracted social conflict that keeps feeding itself. Hence, African states must undertake serious improvements in governance, otherwise it will be difficult to promote peace and development in the region.

Based on a number of research studies undertaken at sub-regional and national levels the magnitude and scope of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons (SALW) vary
from country to country and from sub-region to sub-region. Despite the variations, it is generally agreed that the problem of illicit trafficking in small arms in Africa is principally a derivative of armed conflict or post-conflict violence rather than that of organized crime as is the case in Asia and Latin America. There are two additional elements: first, the majority of small arms (79%) are believed to be in civilian hand followed by 16% in the hands of the military and secondly, weapons are trafficked between African countries as conflicts spread throughout regions in the continent (Survey by UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs, IRIN, Sept 3, 2003).

In a response to this situation, the UN Member States, at the Millennium Summit of 2000, established the linkage between poverty alleviation and economic growth and the proliferation and misuse of SALW. In this regard, ineffective disarmament of SALW contributes to insecurity and impedes development. Hence DDR is a critical instrument for the control of SALW. Progress was also made through the adoption at the July 2001 UN Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. Furthermore, an Open Ended Working Group at the UN is engaged in the negotiating of an international instrument on this problem and to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in SALW. The Commission on Africa has also supported the idea of a treaty that would regulate international trade in SALW.

II. Poverty reduction and Sustainable development

Mr. Chairman,

The experience of the past decade has shown that combating poverty needs an effective decentralisation of resources and responsibilities. Moving government closer to the people is one of the most important elements in fighting poverty. Only the government that understands people’s inspirations and their needs will be in a position to empower them to expand their choices and resolve their own problems. Resolving all the problems
with resources concentrated on central government has been difficult. The communities need to take the lead and build up from their strengths.

Both rich and poor countries have the responsibility of improving governance in Africa. To this effect, education remains an important vehicle in poverty reduction since it empowers people with ideas, skills and knowledge that can be employed in the fight against poverty. However, illiteracy rates continue to be high in the continent while education’s share of national budgets continue to be alarmingly low. This means that African countries have limited capacity to reap the benefits ushered-in by new technologies, especially information technology, while policy formulation capacity; analytical skills, innovation and self-reliance will be difficult to attain.

III. Democratization and Issue of Good Governance

a) Illegitimate Use of Constitutionally Acquired Power

There is a growing danger created by leaders or groups which acquire power legally but proceed to use it illegitimately; i.e., those who ascend to power through constitutional means but upon taking Office, engage in illegitimate actions such as manipulation of the Constitution and national laws for self-perpetuation in power, exploiting ethnic divisions and plundering of the country's resources. This situation, which quite often promotes coup d'états or armed insurgency or domestic political stalemate and economic decline can be illustrated with examples from Guinea Bissau under President Cumba Yalá, in Central African Republic under President Patasse and in parts of Southern and East Africa. The issues of term-limits for Presidents and peaceful alternation to power are assuming important dimensions in the area of governance.

b) The Promise of African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

However, African leaders have accorded the issue of governance high priority in NEPAD. Its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is now in place with 26 countries
voluntarily subscribing to the mechanism. Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Mauritius are the first to offer themselves to be peer reviewed. In support, the United Nations has made important contributions to the APRM. It has also continued its efforts to promote a framework of rules, institutions and practices that set limits and give incentives for the behaviour of individuals, groups and firms. This is predicated on the belief that without good governance, the dangers of global conflicts could be a reality in the 21st century. Trade wars promoting national and corporate interests, uncontrolled financial volatility, untamed global crime and criminalizing business and politics are but few examples. Moreover, today’s institutions of international governance need to be reformed; yet others need to be created in order to deal with a new set of challenges. It should be underlined, however, that the greater responsibility and by and large the great challenge of the global and national governance is responsibility to people, to equity and justice and to equip them to enlarge their choices.

3. Conclusion

The determination of the leadership and peoples of Africa to address their peace and security, development and democratization challenges has been amply demonstrated by the establishment of the African Union and its development arm, NEPAD. These African-owned and African-led institutions have made major progress in meeting their objectives. And the international community, including bilateral donors, the European Union, the Japanese through TICAD process, the Chinese and others have made significant contributions towards meeting Africa’s old and new challenges. On its part, the United Nations is mandated by its Charter to respond to threats to international peace and security; to promote development and higher standards of living for all peoples in the context of a “larger freedom” and fundamental human rights of all peoples. These are of course, the ideals of the Organisation, which have not been fully realised but have not and cannot be abandoned. Indeed, in recent times, especially during the 50th Anniversary of the Organisation (1995) and the Millennium Summit (2000), they have been re-affirmed.
The Monterrey Conference, the Report of the UK-led Commission on Africa, the Sach’s Report and the 60th Summit Session of the General Assembly are expected to generate fresh impetus in concretely assisting Africa address the threats to peace and security and challenges of development and democratization.

I thank you for listening.